United Nations A/64/7/Add.22

General Assembly

Distr.: General
3 March 2010

Original: English

Sixty-fourth session
Agenda item 132
Programme budget for the biennium 2010-2011

Revised estimates relating to the programme budget for the biennium 2010-2011 under sections 28C, Office of Human Resources Management, 28D, Office of Central Support Services, and 36, Staff assessment: Emergency Preparedness and Support Unit

Twenty-third report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions on the programme budget for the biennium 2010-2011

I. Introduction

1. The Advisory Committee has considered the report of the Secretary-General entitled "Revised estimates relating to the programme budget for the biennium 2010-2011 under sections 28C, 28D and 36 related to the Emergency Preparedness and Support Unit" (A/64/662). During its consideration of the report, the Advisory Committee met with representatives of the Secretary-General, who provided additional information and clarification.

2. In his report, the Secretary-General states that "it is imperative for the Organization to put in place a proactive, comprehensive and coordinated system with central capacity to assist the United Nations duty stations, country offices and security management teams in enhancing preparedness for mass casualty events" (A/64/662, para. 1). To that end, he proposes the establishment of an Emergency Preparedness and Support Unit in the Office of Human Resources Management of the United Nations Secretariat to provide a dedicated capacity for support to survivors and the families of those who perish or are injured as the result of a malicious act, natural disaster or other emergency. As indicated in paragraph 7 of the report, the Unit would develop, implement, coordinate and facilitate a support programme consisting of risk-based preparedness, emergency response and post-emergency response. The Unit would, inter alia:

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- Provide assistance to United Nations duty stations, country offices and security management teams in developing, implementing, maintaining and testing emergency medical and mass casualty management plans
- Support the deployment of United Nations medical emergency response teams and rapid-response administrative personnel teams in response to an incident
- Serve as an initial point of contact for incident victims and their families through the establishment of a round-the-clock call centre and a dedicated hotline
- Work with United Nations agencies, funds and programmes to develop a policy framework in respect of support for victims through the Human Resources Network of the United Nations system Chief Executives Board for Coordination
- In the post-emergency response phase, coordinate long-term continuing support to survivors and affected families

The proposed outputs of the Unit are set out in paragraph 8 of the report.

3. The Secretary-General describes his proposal as "an initial step" (see A/64/662, para. 1). He states in paragraph 9 of the report that:

> In order for the United Nations to respond in a compassionate and meaningful way to the needs of survivors and families of staff who have died as a result of natural disasters, malicious attacks directed at the United Nations or other emergencies, other requirements associated with the provision of assistance and support must be considered. These include assistance related to education for dependent children and travel for families of the deceased and survivors to memorial ceremonies and funerals and to places of evacuation.

As indicated in the same paragraph, these requirements would be the subject of a separate report following further evaluation. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that the fully elaborated report, which would include proposals concerning longer-term support for victims and their families, would likely be submitted in the first half of 2011. The Committee points out that the scope of the needs and the full financial implications are therefore not known at this time.

4. The resource requirements for 2010-2011 amount to $3,145,100 million gross ($2,941,300 net). A total of eight new posts are requested (1 D-1 Chief of Unit, 1 P-5 Senior Medical Officer, 1 P-4 Medical Officer, 1 P-4 Policy Officer, 1 P-3 Administrative Officer, 1 P-2 Associate Administrative Officer, 1 P-2 Associate Information Technology Officer, and 1 General Service (Other level) Survivor and Family Support Assistant). As indicated in paragraph 10 of the report, the two Medical Officer posts would be located in the Medical Services Division but would form part of the Emergency Preparedness and Support Unit and those holding the posts would therefore report to the Medical Director as well as the Chief of the Emergency Preparedness and Support Unit. Non-post requirements amounting to $1,775,600 can be derived from the figures shown in table 2 of the report.

II. General observations and recommendations

5. The Advisory Committee received the following clarification: in spite of the timing of its presentation, the proposal of the Secretary-General to establish an Emergency Preparedness and Support Unit was intended not to respond specifically to requirements related to the recent natural disaster in Haiti, but rather to put in place arrangements to deal with any crisis that has occurred or that may occur as the result of natural disasters, malicious acts directed at the United Nations or other emergencies.

6. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that the Secretariat had, in fact, been working on the proposal for about 18 months. The Committee notes that, as can be seen from table 1 of the report, the Organization has been dealing with issues relating to victims of malicious acts and natural disasters since at least 2003. No indication is given as to why resource requirements were not included in the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2010-2011. **In this connection, the Committee draws attention to the provisions of General Assembly resolutions 41/213 and 42/211 governing the use and operation of the contingency fund and recalls Assembly resolutions 62/236 and 64/243, in which the Assembly, inter alia, requested the Secretary-General to take the necessary steps to avoid a piecemeal approach to the budget process and to ensure the fullest possible picture of the Organization's requirements for future bienniums. In the Committee's view, the proposal elaborated for handling the needs described in the Secretary-General's report (see para. 3 above) should be submitted as part of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2012-2013.**

7. The Advisory Committee notes that the Secretary-General's proposal attempts to address three distinct aspects of emergency preparedness, namely: the development of a policy framework to be worked out in consultation with United Nations agencies, funds and programmes; emergency preparedness in the medical sphere, including development and implementation of risk-based emergency medical and mass casualty management plans; and direct medical and administrative support to families and victims.

8. The Secretary-General asserts that currently no capacity or resources exist in the Secretariat to consistently address the spectrum of needs, including risk-based emergency preparedness, immediate response in the event of an incident and the provision of comprehensive and caring support to survivors and families affected by the death or injury of a loved one (A/64/662, para. 2). While the Advisory Committee understands that there may be a lack of policy and coordination and that the Organization has clearly had to rely on volunteers to a significant degree, as demonstrated by the handling of the recent crisis in Haiti, there is still some capacity to deal with these matters within the Organization.

9. **The Advisory Committee points out that, when it comes to unpredictable events, planning and policy development, while necessary, cannot be a substitute for judgement and prioritization. Therefore, any development of policy guidance should take into account the necessity for retaining an element of flexibility in decision-making.**

10. **It is the Advisory Committee's view that communication and coordination on this issue, both within the Office of Human Resources Management and**

between that Office and other Secretariat entities, are of fundamental importance. The Committee is therefore concerned that the establishment of a separate structure would add another layer of bureaucracy. Consequently, the Committee recommends against the establishment of a new Unit. Nevertheless, based on the explanations provided, the Committee can support a limited strengthening of certain functions within the existing structure of the Office of Human Resources Management.

11. **The Advisory Committee recognizes the need for strengthening the Organization's response to the needs of victims and survivors; however, this should be based on a more systematic analysis of the existing capacities of the Secretariat that are engaged in related activities, such as disaster recovery, business continuity and critical incident stress management, and should include exploring and building on complementarities. In the light of that analysis, a careful assessment of the scope of activities should be undertaken. Furthermore, in the Committee's view, greater attention should be given to cooperation and collaboration with United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, including the possibility of cost-sharing arrangements, as well as to the utilization of the voluntary support provided by Member States.**

12. **The Advisory Committee is of the view that, although "ad hoc" in nature, the volunteering on the part of United Nations staff has been an important element of the emergency support provided in the past. The Committee therefore recommends that training in emergency preparedness be incorporated into existing staff training programmes.**

III. Resource requirements

13. One D-1 post is proposed for the Chief of the Emergency Preparedness and Support Unit. **In view of its recommendation made in paragraph 10 above, the Advisory Committee recommends against the establishment of the D-1 post.**

14. With respect to preparedness in the medical sphere, the Advisory Committee was informed, upon enquiry, that the intention with respect to the current proposal was to focus on the need for trained and capable surge capacity for mass casualty incidents so as to ensure medical care for those individuals who were critically injured in an attack or disaster. Further, the Committee was informed that there was a gap in the capacity of the United Nations to deliver medical support, particularly after mass casualty events, and that the medical skill set required was in the area of emergency medicine, trauma management and disaster management. It was expected that the Medical Services Division would assist United Nations medical facilities in preparing for such incidents and that it should be ready to supplement and support overwhelmed or disrupted capabilities in the context of mass casualties. The deployment of United Nations medical response teams, which is an element of the proposed support programme, would allow an assessment of the situation in the area and a review of capabilities and the suitability of local services, and would enable coordination and monitoring of medical evacuation to higher levels of care. The Committee was also informed that, while all duty stations should have emergency plans in place, these should be monitored by United Nations Headquarters to ensure that they are adequate and effective. Further, the Committee was informed that present capacity in the Medical Services Division was insufficient to handle this

task in the approximately 70 field duty stations where field medical facilities are located.

15. **The Advisory Committee recognizes the need to strengthen the Medical Services Division in order to fill the above-mentioned capacity gaps. The Committee therefore recommends approval of one temporary post for 1 P-4 Medical Officer who would coordinate the medical support aspects of emergency preparedness. Given the current staffing of the Medical Services Division (41 positions), the Committee believes that any further requirements could be met from within existing capacity until such time as a more elaborated proposal is submitted, including a policy framework for emergency and post-emergency response. The Committee therefore recommends against approval of the P-5 post proposed for a Senior Medical Officer.**

16. The establishment of a P-4 post is proposed for a Policy Officer. The Advisory Committee was informed that the Policy Officer would, inter alia, coordinate efforts of the United Nations Secretariat and inter-agency groups tasked with examining and developing policies that impact on survivors and family members and would be responsible for facilitating the availability of support and guidance for survivors and family members. He or she would also assist in coordinating the work of the rapid-response emergency administrative personnel and in providing training for staff at Headquarters and in the field in emergency preparedness. **While the Committee considers these functions to be important, it notes that the Office of Human Resources Management has a Human Resources Policy Service in which there are currently 40 positions. Under the circumstances and bearing in mind its recommendation in paragraph 10 above, the Committee believes that the requirement for these functions could be met from within existing capacity. Accordingly, the Committee recommends against the establishment of the requested P-4 post for a Policy Officer.**

17. The Secretary-General requests the establishment of a P-3 Administrative Officer and a P-2 Associate Administrative Officer. The Advisory Committee was informed that these officers would be involved, in particular, in staff welfare and administrative work through, inter alia, maintaining and updating survivor and family lists in coordination with the agencies, funds and programmes; ensuring the availability of advice and guidance for survivors and family members; and providing assistance to post-incident focal points for families and survivors. **The Committee recommends approval of the establishment of a temporary P-2 post for an Associate Administrative Officer. Any additional requirement for administrative support should be met from within existing capacity.**

18. The establishment of a P-2 post is requested for an Associate Information Technology Officer. The Advisory Committee was informed that the Officer would serve as website manager and information technology focal point. In addition, an amount of $50,000 is requested for a consultant who would set up a website with discussion group and web-room functionality so as to allow communication between support groups and survivors and families, and to allow the Secretariat to provide information to them. **The Committee recommends approval of the $50,000 requested for website development; however, given the current staffing of the Human Resources Information Systems Section (18 posts), it is of the view that ongoing requirements for website management could be carried out**

within existing capacity. It therefore recommends against the establishment of the requested P-2 post.

19. **The Advisory Committee recommends approval of the establishment of a temporary General Service (Other level) post in order to provide administrative support relating to the welfare of victims and survivors.**

20. An amount of $281,400 is requested for travel of staff. The Advisory Committee was informed that the requirement was for the travel of two members of the United Nations emergency response medical team to three duty stations annually to conduct testing and simulation of the mass casualty preparedness plan ($68,400); travel to Baghdad and Algiers to meet and follow up with the survivors of the bombings on the United Nations compounds ($45,800); travel of two Medical Officers to the incident sites ($127,200) to assess the way in which local emergency medical services deal with casualties, to assess the need for medical evacuation, to coordinate evacuations, to establish initial lists of victims and casualties for subsequent follow-up, and to act as an on-site medical incident coordinator for Headquarters; and travel for deployment of rapid-response teams to the site of emergency incidents ($40,000). **In view of its recommendations in the paragraphs above, the Committee recommends that the requirement for travel be reduced by 50 per cent, to $140,700. Any additional resource requirements should be met from within existing travel resources of the Office of Human Resources Management.**

IV. Conclusion

21. The actions to be taken by the General Assembly are set out in paragraph 15 of the report of the Secretary-General. **As indicated in paragraph 10 above, the Advisory Committee recommends against the establishment of the Emergency Preparedness and Support Unit at this time. Taking into account its recommendations in the paragraphs above, the Committee recommends the appropriation of an additional amount of $1,571,800 for the biennium 2010-2011 under section 28C, Office of Human Resources Management ($1,358,700), section 28D, Office of Central Support Services ($147,300), and section 36, Staff assessment ($65,800), to be offset by a corresponding amount under income section 1, Income from staff assessment, of the programme budget for the 2010-2011. The amount of $1,571,800 would represent a charge against the contingency fund.**